



## *The Soldier's Wife* by Joanna Trollope

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### **About the author:**

Born in her grandfather's rectory in the Cotswolds in December 1943, Joanna has always thought of the Cotswolds as her true home. *"Being born somewhere with a strong local sense, like the Cotswolds, gave me not just a sense of rootedness, but a capacity to value landscape and weather and the rich life of smallish communities. It wouldn't matter where I lived now, I'd always carry that centred feeling of having come from somewhere very well defined with me."*

After winning a scholarship to Oxford University, Joanna joined the Foreign Office and then became a teacher. She began writing 'to fill the long spaces after the children had gone to bed' and for many years combined her writing career with working as a teacher. In 1980, Joanna became a full-time author. *"My first novel was written when I was 14, all about myself, of course (it is now kept under lock and key in case my children find it...) I suppose I wrote it for the same reason that I still write - to communicate. I don't think we should ever underestimate the power of story - story is how we negotiate with each other, how we build up relationships, how we learn. And nothing is so fascinating as good narrative - nobody of any age can resist What Happens Next ..."*

Joanna still writes longhand and is happy to write almost anywhere - an airport departure lounge, a country kitchen table, or the quiet, west-facing study in her London house. For all her novels, Joanna undertakes meticulous research, involving huge amounts of interviewing and travel - often on foot or by London bus.

Source: Author's website (<http://www.joannatrollope.com>)

### **About this book:**

Alexa Riley eagerly awaits the return of her husband Dan, a major in the British Army, after a six-month tour of duty in Afghanistan. But the long-awaited reunion isn't as perfect as she imagined, as her husband struggles to put the horrors of war behind him and readjust to family life. But for Alexa—who has been putting her own career dreams on hold while raising their three girls—the distance between them, both while Dan is away and at home, is unbearable. This poignant look at the inner workings of a modern military family questions just how much one is willing to compromise for family and what happens when love and vocation collide.

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**Discussion Questions:**

1. Although Dan has returned home to England, in what ways is he still in Afghanistan? What are some of the biggest adjustments he has to face at home?
2. How do Dan and Alexa both contribute to the breakdown of communication in their marriage? What is the most vital information each one withholds from the other? What motivates Dan? Alexa?
3. Many outside forces affect Dan and Alexa's marriage. Discuss how the events involving Isabel, Gus and Kate, and the wounded soldiers impacted their reunion.
4. Discuss the support system of women who emerge in the novel. Consider Franny, Mo, and Mel's character in your response. In what ways does Mel represent a different path for military wives? Do you have a group of friends you turn to for support?
5. Discuss the generational differences among the Riley military men: Eric, George, and Dan. What issues pose a challenge for Dan that his father and grandfather did not experience in their day? In what ways do the two elder Rileys have the benefit of hindsight?
6. Compare the descriptions of day-to-day life on the military base with life in London. In what ways is the city an escape for Alexa?
7. Dan and Alexa's friends and family subtly involve themselves in the couple's relationship. Do you think actions taken by well-meaning outsiders helped or hurt Dan and Alexa's relationship?
8. What role does Jack Dearlove fill in Alexa's life that Dan cannot? Does Jack overstep his bounds in any way? Does Dan have the right to feel jealous or threatened?
9. How does Isabel's unhappiness at boarding school illustrate the turmoil within the Riley family? What message do you think is Isabel trying to send to her parents?
10. Discuss the roles of hierarchy, structure, and authority in *The Soldier's Wife*. How does the leadership styles of Mrs. Cairns, Mack, and George differ? In your opinion, does a family need structure or an authority figure?
11. How did you react to Dan and Gus's decisions about their military service? Do you think each man made the best decision for his family? For himself?
12. Do you know anyone from your personal life who has served in the military? Did reading *The Soldier's Wife* affect your perception of what it is like to serve—both for service members and their families? Do you think this depiction of a military family is accurate? Why or why not?



13. What do you think the future holds for Dan and Alexa, both in their relationship and in their careers?  
How do you imagine their story playing out?

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